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ABSTRACT

Two hundred seven parents of patients at the St. Louis University Orthodontic Clinic chose ideal male and female profiles from groups of five profile drawings ranging from severely retregnathic to severely prognathic. In addition, they completed a self concept questionnaire (Bills Index of Adjustment) and picked from the profile drawings of the profile they felt most closely resembled their own. A silhouette photograph of each subject provided an objective profile. Fifty-six percent of the subjects were able to correctly classify their own profile and 93% of the subjects agreed with the orthodontic conception of the ideal profile. Of the subjects who misperceived their profiles those in the high self esteem group judged their profiles to be less ideal than they actually were. Since there were equal percentages of subjects with ideal profiles in each self esteem group, self concept does not appear to be appreciably influenced by objective appearance. Rather, in most cases it seems that a person's perception of his facial profile is determined by his psychological self satisfaction rather than by his objective appearance. (Author)

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The Relationship of Self-Concept, Objective Appearance and Profile Self Perception

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The Relationship of Self-Concept, Objective Appearance and Profile Self Perception

In her recent review of the literature on the self concept, Ruth Wylie (1974) called for more investigation into the relationship of the self concept to physical appearance. Previous investigators have found a significant correlation between self concept and self perception (or body image), particularly for salient body areas (Rosen & Ross, 1965; Zion, 1965) but they have not related self perception to objective appearance. Therefore, it has remained unclear whether a positive self concept and body image develop independently or whether positive body image is an outgrowth of positive self concept regardless of objective appearance. This study contends that satisfaction with one's physical profile is determined by factors other than objective appearance, i.e. that the self concept is a moderator of a person's perception of and satisfaction with his physical appearance.

Method

Subjects. The subjects were parents of orthodontic patients at the St. Louis University Orthodontic Clinic. This particular population of subjects was used because: 1) orthodontic problems are largely gentically linked and therefore these subjects would represent a broad range of facial profile types; 2) the facial profile could be expected to be a salient body area for these subjects. The random sample of adult Caucasians from the clinic waiting room consisted of 181 females and 26 males, a total of 207 subjects.

Procedure. Ideal male and female profiles were generated by computer (see last page of handout - ideals are F5 and M2). A continuum of five profile drawings ranging from severely retregnathic to severely

prognathic was generated for each sex by varying only the position of the lower third of the face. The profiles were drawn by an artist to be life size and free from unnecessary anatomical detail. They were arranged in random order and mounted on poster board.

The subject was asked to choose an ideal male and female profile from the drawings. The subject then completed parts 1 and 3 of Bill's Index of Adjustment and Values (Bills, Undated Manual). This highly reliable and valid self concept measure yields a real-ideal self concept discrepancy score. The subject was then asked to pick from the appropriate sex group the profile which most nearly resembled his/her own. A direct silhouette photograph of the subject was then obtained and this was catagorized by two orthodontists as to which of the profile drawings it most nearly resembled. The interjudge reliability was .96. Subjects were also catagorized as having high (discrepancy <29; -1/2 sd), low (discrepancy >55; +1/2 sd) or moderate self esteem.

Results and Discussion

Fifty-six percent of the subjects were able to correctly identify their profiles and 93% of the subjects agreed with the orthodontic conception of the ideal profile. Neither accuracy of self perception nor agreement with the ideal was significantly mediated by self concept level (see Table 1). Because of the positive value attached to good facial esthetics, it was expected that a higher percentage of subjects with ideal profiles would be in the high self esteem group. However, the data did not support this expectation - subjects with ideal profiles were equally distributed among all self esteem groups.

A chi square analysis of the subjects who misperceived their profiles revealed that significantly more subjects in the high esteem group

evidenced satisfaction with their profiles than subjects in the low self esteem group ($X^2 = 5.59$, df = 1, $p<.05$) (see Table 2). Subjects in the high self esteem group also judged themselves to be ideal when they were not more often than Ss in the low self esteem group and Ss in the low self esteem group were much more likely to judge themselves as being not ideal when they really were (see Table 3). This finding is consistent with the contention of many self concept theorists that persons with both very small and very large real-ideal self concept discrepancies don't see themselves realistically.

Subjects with high self esteem were more satisfied with their facial profiles than subjects of low self esteem, regardless of their objective appearance. It appears that perception of and satisfaction with physical appearance is determined by psychological self satisfaction rather than objective appearance determining self esteem.

It should be noted that these conclusions are based on correlational data and therefore further research into the causal relationship between self esteem and self perception is necessary. However, this research does constitute a necessary first step in the establishment of a predictive system based on self esteem for determining which persons would receive psychological benefit from cosmetic surgery or orthodontic procedures to improve their appearance and which persons would remain dissatisfied with their appearance even after a perfectly esthetic result had been obtained. Anecodatal evidence of the need for such applied research has been reported by Jacobsen, Myers, Edgerton, Cantor and Slaughter (1961) who found patients psychological reactions to rhinoplasty were extremely variable - ranging from healthy personality change to a worsening of personality functioning. In addition, several studies of juvenile delinquents and prison inmates have shown that improvement of facial esthetics through plastic surgery did not lead to reduced recidivism

rates as was expected (Knorr, Hoopes & Edgerton, 1968; Meyer, Hoopes, Jabaley, & Allen, 1973; Schuring & Dodge, 1967; Spira, Chizen, Gerow & Hardy, 1966; Velasco, Woolf & Broadbent, 1967). It can be hypothesized, based on the results of the present study, that this was due to a failure to deal with the underlying self concept problems of the subjects.

The results of the present study can be applied to a wide variety of pratical situations pertaining to the psychological changes which might accompany any drastic changes in physical appearance, e.g., breast augmentation or reduction, mastectomy, intestinal bypass surgery for obesity, etc.

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The Relationship of Self-Concept, Objective

Appearance and Profile Self-Perception

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Self Perception and Objective Appearance	Self Esteem Group			
	Low Esteem	Moderate Esteem	High Esteem	Total
number of subjects who accurately judged their profiles	62% (r=.60)	53% (r=.46)	58% (r=.47)	56% (r=.49)
distribution of ideal profiles	55%	57%	54%	56%
Ss who agreed with orthodontic ideal	87%	97%	90.5%	93%

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Chi Square Analysis of the Relationship of

Self Concept to Profile Judgement

Self Perception	Self Concept		
	High	Low	Total
Discrepancy between real-ideal judgements	18	28	46
No discrepancy between real-ideal judgements	35	19	54
Total	53	47	100

$X^2 = 5.59$, df = 1, $p < .05$

Direction of Distortion of Profile Judgements by

Subjects who Misperceived their Profiles

Self Perception	Self Concept Group			
	High Esteem	Moderate Esteem	Low Esteem	Total
Judged themselves ideal when not	66.7%	57.9%	20%	53%
Judged themselves not ideal when they were	33.3%	42.1%	80%	47%

FEMALE

MALE